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TAGS: PGOV KPKO MOPS CG

SUBJECT: FEWER ITURI COMBATANTS THAN EXPECTED DISARMING AS
DEADLINE DRAWS NEAR

Classified By: Charge S. Brock (reasons 1.4 b/d)

¶1. (SBU) With three days remaining in the current Ituri District disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion (DDR) program, approximately 1,000 of an anticipated 4,600 combatants -- less than one quarter -- have handed over their weapons. According to UNDP officials running the initiative, as of September 9 1,037 combatants from the three main Ituri militia groups -- the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC), the Front for National Integration (FNI), and the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) -- have reported to the District's ten disarmament sites. Lists submitted by militia leaders to military authorities August 17 indicated that 4,691 intended to go through the DDR process. The date for voluntary disarmament is September 13; combatants began disarming July 27 under the program.

¶2. (SBU) In a surprise to DDR officials, not a single surrendering combatant has chosen military integration; all 945 former militia members processed to date have selected community reinsertion. Original projections, based on the results of previous DDR programs in the DRC, estimated that approximately 40 percent of combatants would choose to enter the military.

¶3. (SBU) Congolese military and UNDP officials are optimistic that the remaining 3,600 will disarm by the September 13 deadline. Fidel Djoda, the UNDP's DDR operations director in Ituri, told us September 10 the "hard core" combatants will usually wait until the last minute to participate because they are looking for guarantees the process will treat them fairly. He explained that all former militia members have opted for community reinsertion because they view the "exit package" as much more attractive option than life in the Congolese army (FARDC). Those returning to civilian life receive a series of benefits, including an immediate USD 50 "installation allowance;" a voucher for voluntary participation in a three-month community reconstruction project which pays USD 50 per month; and a USD 60 training stipend, paid three months after demobilization.

¶4. (SBU) According to UNDP statistics, most ex-combatants participating in the program have come from the ranks of the MRC and FRPI. A total of 463 of 568 expected members of Mathieu Ngudjolo's MRC had disarmed by September 9. Another 436 combatants are from Cobra Matata's FRPI, although the list Matata submitted to DDR officials contains an additional 3,521 militia members. UNDP reports that 138 combatants from Peter Karim's FNI have turned in their weapons, leaving 602 remaining from his group to disarm. UNDP officials point out that of the 1,000-plus militia members who have reported to disarmament sites, all have respected the "one-man, one weapon" rule being enforced in this latest DDR program.

¶5. (SBU) Minister of Defense Chikez Diemu said in press interviews September 5 that any militia members who do not disarm by the September 13 will be the target of military operations. MONUC officials, including SRSG Swing, have privately affirmed Chikez's comments. Swing told PolOff in late August that MONUC peacekeepers in Ituri were already planning joint operations with the FARDC to begin several weeks after the deadline. The last sustained joint operations by MONUC and the FARDC against Ituri militias took place in mid-2006.

¶6. (C) Comment: This latest Ituri DDR program has been better-planned and better-executed than its predecessors, but it will fail to reach its target. Militia leaders continue to haggle with the GDRC over real and perceived slights -- such as the ranks granted their troops and the question of amnesty -- and thus keep their members from surrendering. The militias themselves are splintering, with several factions refusing outright to demobilize. Once the deadline passes, DDR authorities will re-evaluate the program's process, but most officials are convinced military action will be required by the end of the year to disarm remaining combatants. End comment.

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